

OAS Short of Funding, Not Short of Imagination

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Kari Cyr, Olds Gazette

The Olds Agricultural Society (OAS) needs to build and expand in order to better service the community, but a lack of funding has been complicating the process.

The OAS received a \$4 million grant from the Alberta Lottery Fund back in March 2005 for the proposed upgrades and expansion. The requested amount for the proposal was about \$7.7 million, and after receiving about 50 per cent, the OAS had some difficult choices to make.

"There were no bells and whistles built into what we asked for," said Tami Gardner, general manager of the OAS. "We were only funded 50 percent, so we can only build 50 per cent."

Although the OAS is coming up short with funding, they are willing and dedicated to exploring all options for additional fundraising, including sponsorships.

"We have a relationship with Budweiser that is presently Fair oriented," explained Gardner. "As the Agricultural Society has the opportunity to expand into more year round utilization of food and beverage services, we may be able to expand on those type of sponsorship relationships."

In the meantime, the OAS is looking at construction in two phases to ensure there is enough room and flexibility to expand into future projects.

Phase one will see a new arena with stands for about 800 people, gravel parking facilities, and support areas, such as an administration area, lobby and washrooms.

Phase two includes a large banquet hall that would hold about 500 people, a small lounge area that would hold about 200 people, a kitchen and concession, warm-up areas, wash area, parking and new stables.

The estimated construction costs for phase one is \$4.5 million and \$4.2 million for phase two, with a total cost of \$8.7 million.

The question now for the OAS is whether or not that will be adequate enough to serve the users and stakeholders of the society.

"We are confident in trying to design a facility that is multi-functional, that will serve our equine clients as well as our cattle, 4-H, and sheep events," said Gardner. "We want to ensure that there is flexibility in the design features included in the development that will provide the necessary facilities for all of those groups."

"Both our city colleagues, Calgary and Red Deer, enjoy having high end shows but other shows like bovine events are not welcome," explained Gardner. "We want to be the first choice destination for these events."

"We feel that the development fills a definite void and need in the community and is certainly worthy of trying to obtain the funding necessary to proceed with the project in its entirety," said Gardner.

For the complete story, contact the Olds Gazette.